

Lent sermon series week 5 'Generous with our hearts' John 4:43-54

I was in Widdrington school on Monday and the head teacher was taking their family worship at the end of the day. This week's theme was 'Mothers', and she asked the children why they loved their Mums. The answers came thick and fast.

Because she tidies my bedroom for me. Because she gives me my favourite food for tea. Because she listens to me was the head teacher's own answer. Because she lets me play on the computer. Because she buys me things. Because she gives me big hugs when I'm sad and when I'm happy.

These answers are the signs, the indications that their Mums love them. Do these children only believe their Mum loves them because of what she does, because of what they can see?

Today is a perfect day for thinking about generosity, how our Mums/ Mothers love or loved us, and also how we express our love to them, not only in gifts of flowers or chocolates today but always, every day whether we live nearby or far apart.

This morning the sermon is titled, being **generous with our hearts**. This is the 5th week of our sermon series on Generosity. We have looked at what generosity is when we saw Jesus turn water into wine. We saw Jesus healing at the pool of Bethesda and we were challenged to be generous with our actions. Then we considered being generous with our possessions. Last week John looked at being generous with our words.

The people in the gospel story today wanted to see the signs and miracles Jesus did so they could believe in Jesus, but actually they were getting stuck at the *seeing the signs*-they weren't that interested in what Jesus had to say or who he was.

Tom Wright says it is like being on a treasure hunt and getting far too interested in the clues for their own sake and forgetting the hunt to discover the treasure.

Jesus must be delighted when he meets the royal official who takes Jesus at his word. He didn't need to see a miracle happen, v50b **'The man believed what Jesus said to him and started on his way.'**

Jesus' words became flesh, the rich court official believed him, and boy was healed.

Believing and trusting on the strength of **what Jesus has said** and who he is, rather than on seeing something he has done is an important distinction Jesus makes throughout his ministry. Remember his words to Thomas when he has seen the risen Lord Jesus and believed, **'Blessed are they who haven't seen and yet have believed'!**

The challenge of the gospel today isn't that we are invited to believe in some abstract idea, or a feeling, or a spiritual experience, rather **we are invited to believe in the Word become flesh, in the person Jesus, who is also God.**

Belief in God starts in the heart, with a relationship with a real person, Jesus. The court official came to Jesus and trusted him. It is impossible to know God only through intellect and reasoning. We have **to surrender our wills and hearts to him** and in doing this **we acknowledge our dependence on Him.** The court official had to depend totally on Jesus.

Did the children in school only believe their Mum loves them because of what she does? No but they saw actions that let them **know** they were loved? Deep down in their hearts they **experienced** their mothers' love well before, and beyond the actions, and got to the real treasure.

Here in this reading we see a father, it could have been a mother, do what any parent would do for their child if it is at all possible. He wants to protect and find a solution to the problem for his dying son. He travelled 20 miles, from Capernaum to Cana. He will beg, even though this is a rich court official coming to a poor carpenter. He will abandon himself, forget his own importance, anything in order to make his child well.

The father doesn't come wanting to see signs and wonders, he comes with a genuine need. He isn't put off when Jesus talks about other people's wrong reasons for asking for healing. He has heard enough about Jesus, and knows in his heart that Jesus can heal his child.

He believes Jesus and takes him at his word, and his child lives! And so do all his household believe. This isn't a story where Jesus does a miracle, a need is met, and we are left wondering if they became followers of Jesus, his disciples? **This man's life changed because of Jesus and because he believed in his word.**

Have we done this ourselves? **Have we taken Jesus at his word and believed and trusted in him to save us, heal us and set us free?** Are we seeking him, the treasure, or getting caught up with the clues and trying to work it out, but missing the treasure?

As soon as we are aware of our own need for God's love and healing and have received it then we can share this, give this treasure away to others. **We can be generous with our hearts and faith!** Our world today is broken. No one is exempt from pain and sorrow. We all become ill. We all sin. Death is part of all our lives-no one is an exception. But there is the Good News we can share, that Jesus is ready to meet us here today in each and every one of those many situations. God has reached down and got involved in our lives, by sending Jesus, God's Word to become flesh, real and human like us.

In Luke Jesus stood up in the synagogue and read from the scroll, Isaiah 61, he said (NIVUK)

61 *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,*^[a]

This is what he came to do. This is the Gospel. Jesus is so compassionate to those in great need. There are many stories in the gospels about his compassion for the people. He saw their needs and responded to them. Those whose hearts are breaking or broken he longs to help, and those who are spiritually blind and not seeing who Jesus is, or their need for God in their lives, and those who need healing, well beyond the physical.

Do our hearts beat with the same compassion as Jesus' did and not just for our family and friends but strangers? Do we allow ourselves to be disturbed, inconvenienced by our hurting broken world? Do we see the needs and turn away? Where is there suffering or injustice? Where are the hurting people? **How do we care for the least, the lonely and lost? Can we be generous with our hearts?** It will cost us to respond to these needs in our world-are we ready?

Today we remember and celebrate the love of our mothers or mother figures, who loved us, gave themselves often sacrificially for us, putting us first before themselves. In such examples we see the love of God towards us expressed through human beings, and we can rightly thank God for his gift of love to us in the way.

In this communion we also remember and celebrate how God's generous love reaches down and rescues us from guilt and shame, our spiritual poverty and blindness, but also meets us in our pain and sorrow, our brokenheartedness. Jesus died for our sin, our wrong doing, but also for the wrong done to us, and he died to bring us healing, forgiveness and salvation if we will put our trust and faith in him.

And in communion he feeds, nourishes and strengthens us spiritually, which we need so much because the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon **each of us** if we have put our faith and trust in Jesus. We are to be like him, to reach out to others with his compassion and love. We are to be **generous with ourselves** as he gave himself completely for us.

May God give us more of his love, grace, courage and strength to go and be compassionate Jesus in the world. Amen